

Mental Health Awareness Month: *"In Every Story, There's Strength"*

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Since 1949, Mental Health Awareness Month has been observed every May as an opportunity for individuals and communities to reflect on the vital importance of mental health. It is a time to foster awareness, encourage education, and work toward eliminating the stigma that often prevents people from seeking help. Stigma surrounding mental health can create barriers, leading many people to hesitate in seeking support due to the fear of judgement. Mental Health Awareness Month seeks to combat the stigma by promoting education, encouraging open discussion and providing resources that empower individuals to prioritize their mental health. Throughout the month, various initiatives aim to challenge misconceptions, replace harmful negative stereotypes with understanding, and encourage honest conversations about the benefits of seeking help.

Prioritizing mental health is essential to overall well-being and to promoting a healthy life balance. This year's theme, *"In Every Story, There's Strength"*, highlights the diverse experiences that shape mental health journeys and emphasize the resilience found in sharing one's story. By fostering connection and understanding, this theme encourages individuals to embrace their own unique mental health journey and find strength in shared experiences.

As we observe Mental Health Awareness month, take a moment to listen and learn from others' stories. Reflect on your own journey—the challenges, growth and the ways in which our collective experiences shape how we navigate mental health. Here are some ways to celebrate Mental Health Awareness Month this year:

- Share your story with the National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI): NAMI's campaign this year includes the opportunity to share your mental health story through video, audio recording, or written story.
- Engage in social media content: Enhance your understanding and learn from other on social media and start or contribute to discussion on the topic
- Educate yourself: Read about different mental health issues, attend lectures or seminars on the topic, and with this year's theme, focus on diverse mental health journeys

- Practice self-care: Take the time out of your day to do something that will promote mental well-being. Try mindfulness activities such as meditation, yoga, or journaling. Or do an activity that allows you to de-stress such as crafting, painting, cooking, or walking.
- Support mental health organizations: Volunteer or donate at mental health organizations to contribute to the cause
- Check out state resources: It is important to be aware of the resources available to you and your loved ones in case ever needed. Here are some links to NJ based resources:
 - Division of Mental Health and Addiction Mental Health Resources:
<https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/dmhas/resources/mental/>
 - Division of Mental Health and Addiction Mental Health's Directory of Mental Health Services (by county and by program type):
https://nj.gov/humanservices/dmhas/home/hotlines/MH_Dir_COMPLETE.pdf
 - NAMI New Jersey's site: <https://naminj.org/>
 - New Jersey Mental Health Cares: <https://www.mhanj.org/new-jersey-mental-health-cares/>